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AUTHOR Gonzalez, Kenneth P.; Stoner, Carla; Jovel, Jennifer
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ABSTRACT

Using life history methods, this study sought to produce a more adequate understanding of how Latinas acquire the opportunity to attend postsecondary institutions, especially 4-year universities. The examination focused on primary and secondary school experiences of two different groups of Latinas and how those experiences limited or expanded their opportunities to pursue postsecondary education. The first group of 12 students completed their K-12 schooling having acquired the opportunity to attend a prestigious 4-year university. The second group, 10 students, did not meet the requirements for admission into a 4-year university and began their postsecondary education at a community college. The findings suggest that exposure to or accumulation of high or low volumes of social capital or institutional neglect and abuse limited or expanded the students' perceived and actual opportunities for college. (Contains 1 figure and 22 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Examining Opportunities for Latinas in Higher Education:

Toward a College Opportunity Framework

Kenneth P. González, University of San Diego

and

Carla Stoner, University of California at Merced

Jennifer Jovel, Stanford University

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Kenneth P. González, Assistant Professor of Education, University of San Diego, 5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110. Email – kennethg@sandiego.edu

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Examining Opportunities for Latinas in Higher Education:

Toward a College Opportunity Framework

Abstract

Using life history research methods, this study sought to produce a more adequate understanding of how Latinas acquire the opportunity to attend postsecondary institutions, particularly four-year universities. We focused our examination on the primary and secondary school experiences of two different groups of Latinas, and how those experiences limited or expanded their opportunities to pursue postsecondary education. The first group of students completed their K-12 schooling having acquired the opportunity to attend a prestigious four-year university. The second group did not meet the requirements for admittance into a four-year university and began their postsecondary education at a community college. The findings of the study suggest that exposure to or accumulation of high or low volumes of social capital or institutional neglect and abuse limited or expanded the students' perceived and/or actual opportunities for college.

Examining Opportunities for Latinas in Higher Education:

Toward a College Opportunity Framework

In this paper, we attempt to provide a more helpful explanation of how some students complete their primary and secondary schooling with more opportunities for postsecondary attendance than others do. Specifically, we focus our examination on the primary and secondary school experiences of Latinas from working-class families and how those experiences limited or expanded their opportunities to pursue postsecondary education, specifically in four-year universities.

We focus on Latinas for a number of reasons. First, Latinas are the least formally educated female ethnic population in the United States. In nearly every measure of education achievement (achievement tests, high school completion, college participation, and college graduation rates) Latinas lag behind their female counterparts (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Second, Latinas represent one of the fastest growing ethnic populations in the United States (U.S. Census, 2001). Consequently, it is in this country's social and economic interest to produce better educational outcomes for this population. And finally, few studies have examined the unique educational experiences of Latinas (Ceja, 2000; Gandara, 1982; Vasquez, 1985). Far more often, scholars have examined the educational experiences of Latinos without any specific attention paid to gender differences.

Understanding the college attendance behavior of underrepresented students is a complicated endeavor. It is clear that ability and academic achievement do not adequately explain the low college attendance rates for African American, Latinas/os, and for some Asian American ethnic sub-populations (Lucas & Good, 2001; Teranishi, In Press). Recently, a growing number of scholars in the college choice literature (Ceja 2000, Freeman, 1997; Hurtado,

Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2000; Teranishi, forthcoming) have used the concepts of cultural and social capital borrowed from the work of Bourdieu, (1977), Coleman (1988), and Stanton-Salazar (1997) to better explain the decision-making process of underrepresented students to pursue postsecondary education. McDonough (1997) defines cultural capital as "that property that middle and upper class families transmit to their offspring, which substitutes for or supplements the transmission of economic capital as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations (p. 8)." Stanton-Salazar (1997) describes social capital as relationships with institutional agents that can be converted into socially valued resources and opportunities. Institutional agents, as defined by Stanton-Salazar (1997) includes "those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities" (1997, p. 6). Stanton-Salazar notes that while institutional agents within schools often function as conduits for reproducing race and class social inequalities, they also may function as "lifelines" to resources and opportunities that allow ethnic minority students to overcome social structural barriers and experience school success and social mobility.

Using these concepts, many scholars argue that the college decision-making process of underrepresented students is limited due to their lack of cultural and social capital. Regarding cultural capital, these scholars argue that underrepresented high school students do not adequately possess the knowledge of "what college is, the diversity of institutions, the admissions process, the graduation rates of different types of institutions, and the conversion capacity of various degrees" (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997, p. 5). For example, Freeman (1997) found that a group of African American high school students' decision to pursue higher education were constrained due to their perception about their ability to pay for college

and whether the long-term economic benefits of college attendance would exceed their costs. McDonough, Antonio, & Trent (1997) found that those African American students with acquired knowledge about college from personal affiliations[1] were positively associated with college attendance in both predominantly White institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. And, Perna (2000) found that cultural and social capital was an important contributor to the four-year college attendance for African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. She went on to note that for African Americans and Hispanics, social and cultural capital were as important as ability in the college decision-making process.

Regarding social capital, many scholars argue that underrepresented students do not adequately possess or have access to the informal or formal social networks that may serve as conduits for college opportunities. In addition to Perna's (2000) findings, Teranishi (forthcoming), in his study of Chinese and Filipino American high school seniors in high and low socio-economic status schools, found that students attending a high socio-economic status school had greater access to the kinds of networks that would support or influence their college attendance than students who attended low socio-economic high schools. Finally, Ceja (2000), in his exploratory study of 20 Chicana high school seniors, found that their social networks of support within the schools were insufficient in helping them to navigate the college decision-making and planning process.

Clearly, the use of cultural and social capital as theoretical constructs have improved our understanding of the college decision-making process of underrepresented students. However, we argue that more works needs to be done in this area. First, we contend that the concepts of cultural and social capital may be more fully utilized by additional examination of the college decision-making process of underrepresented students. Specifically, we ask how much social

capital does a student need to improve their opportunity for and knowledge of attending college? Also, we ask if there are particular sources of social capital that are more important than others in helping students with college attendance? In addition, we wonder in what ways do underrepresented students acquire the types of social capital that improves their opportunities for college attendance? Finally, as qualitative researchers, we ponder whether other theoretical constructs may be developed inductively from the emic perspective of underrepresented students that may improve our understanding of the opportunities they may acquire to attend college.

In reviewing the relevant college choice literature (Ceja 2000, Freeman, 1997; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2000; Teranishi, In Press) we also noticed that many of the studies focused on the students' experiences during their junior or senior years in high school. In some respects, it seems logical to focus on the college decision-making process during those latter high school years since the next educational level for these students would be college. However, scholars (Lucas, 1999; Oaks, 1985) who examine "tracking" affects within the public school system remind us that by the time most low-income, underrepresented students reach their junior and senior years in high school, the choices they have to attend college, particularly four-year institutions, are limited. To put it simply, for most low-income, underrepresented high school juniors and seniors, the salient question is not "which type of university will they choose," but "do they even have the opportunity to attend a four-year institution?" It is for the reasons cited above that we chose not to focus our analysis on the question of college choice, but rather on college opportunity. In other words, we wanted to understand how some students complete their K-12 public schooling with more opportunities for college attendance than others do.

Data Collection Methods

To focus our investigation, we used life-history research methods (Dollard, 1935; Goodson, 1981; Knowles, 1993) to examine the primary and secondary school experiences of two different groups of Latinas, both of whom came from low socio-economic status backgrounds and attended low-to-middle socio-economic status public schools. The first group of Latinas we interviewed (12 in total) completed their K-12 schooling with the opportunity to attend two of the most highly selective universities in the state of California. The second group of Latinas we interviewed (10 in total) began their postsecondary education at a California community college. Eight of the ten students enrolled in a community college as a result of not meeting the admission criteria for a four-year university. The remaining two students met such admission criteria, but did not perceive that they would successfully gain admittance.

Because we believed that it was important to capture both the students' primary and secondary school experiences in understanding their opportunities for college, we employed life history research methods (Dollard, 1935; Goodson, 1981; Knowles, 1993). Dollard (1935) defines life history as "an attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it (p. 3)." Coles (1994) describes the aims of life history research to be "the understanding of life as lived...and as influenced by personal, institutional, and social histories (p. 3.)." Given our aims for this study, we believed that life-history methods would be both helpful and appropriate.

The first group of 12 students we interviewed (from this point on referred to as the "university students") occurred during the fall of 1999. The interviews were conducted on the students' university campuses. Most of these students were from the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Two students were from Fresno, California. The majority of the participants were in their

sophomore or junior year in college. However, three of the students were in their senior year. The primary method of data collection was individual, face-to-face interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice over a four-month period. In addition, participants responded to probing questions via email. Finally, the participants were given transcripts of their individual interviews and were asked to clarify or offer any additional comments.

The second group of students we interviewed (from this point on referred to as the "community college students") occurred during the spring semester of 2000. The interviews were conducted on their community college campus. All of the students were from the San Francisco Bay Area. The students were in their final semester in college and were preparing to transfer to a four-year university. Similar to the first group, this group of 10 students was interviewed twice during a four-month period. The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours on each occasion. Additionally, the students responded to probing questions via email. Finally, the students were given the transcripts of their interviews and were asked to clarify or expand on their comments. The background characteristics of the second group were quite similar to those of the first. These similarities included: (a) being from working-class or low socio-economic status families, (b) attending low-to-middle socio-economic status public schools, (c) the majority of their parents being immigrants to the United States with less than a high school education, and (d) being raised in a monolingual Spanish or bilingual (Spanish and English) home environment. What was unique about this group of students was that after they had completed their K-12 public schooling, most of them did not meet the criteria to gain admittance into a four-year university. All of the students in this group began their postsecondary education at a California community college. These students were unique in another respect. Unlike many students who begin their postsecondary education at a community

college, all of these students are now participating in California's top tier postsecondary educational institution: The University of California System.

The primary questions guiding the design and analysis of this study included: (a) in what ways were the K-12 schooling experiences similar or different for these two groups of Latinas? (b) how might those differences or similarities explain their college opportunities? Another question we deemed important included: (c) what role does social capital play in the primary and secondary school experiences of these two groups? We analyzed the data for each group separately using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) method of qualitative data analysis. For Lincoln and Guba, data analysis is a matter of induction not reduction. They state, "Inductive analysis...begins not with theories or hypotheses but with the data themselves, from which theoretical categories and relational propositions may be arrived at by inductive reasoning processes" (p. 333). Starting with data, then, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain inductive analysis as having two main components: unitizing and categorizing. A researcher unitizes his or her data by searching for an element (phrase, sentence, paragraph) that is "heuristic" or "aimed at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or to take" (p. 345).

Once data have been unitized, units that relate to the same content are grouped together in "provisional categories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347). Categorizing is achieved through the use of the constant comparative method. In other words, units are compared to each other to establish whether they are similar and should be put in the same category, or different and should be put into different categories. Once the categories contain more and more units, the researcher attempts to "put into a propositional statement the properties that seem to characterize" (p. 348) the category. This statement establishes the "rule" for further inclusion of units into the category. Finally, each category is reviewed for consistency and categories are compared to make sure

each is unique. The goal is to have categories that are "internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible" (p. 349). The following section presents the categories that were inductively constructed through data analysis.

Place Figure 1 About Here.

Findings

The general findings of the study are represented in figure 1, and delineate our model of college opportunity. In many ways, our model is an application of the work of Bourdieu (1986) and builds on the framework developed by Stanton-Salazar (1997). However, while Stanton-Salazar's model attempts to highlight the barriers confronting ethnic minority students, which preclude them from developing relationships with institutional agents, our model elaborates on the agents, types, and amounts of social capital potentially available to Latina students.

To begin, we placed social capital on a continuum from low to high volume. Following Stanton-Salazar's definition of institutional agents (1997), we labeled agents of social capital as those persons who "have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of valued resources and opportunities" (p. 6) including: (a) emotional support, (b) access to privileged information or knowledge, and (c) access to opportunities for college admittance. To provide an example, a "high volume" agent of social capital would be able to transmit directly or negotiate the transmission of all three of these valued resources and opportunities. On the other hand, a "low volume" agent of social capital might only be able to transmit one of these valued resources.

Potential Agents of Social Capital

Family:
Parents
Siblings
Extended Family Members

School:
Specialized Honors Programs
Teachers
Counselors

College/University:
College Outreach and Preparation Programs

High Volume	Low Volume	Low Volume	High Volume
Institutional Neglect or Abuse		**Social Capital**	

Potential Agents of Institutional Neglect and Abuse

The General School Curriculum
ESL and Special Education Tracking
Teachers
Counselors
School Administrators

Note: Exposure to or accumulation of high or low volumes of social capital or institutional neglect or abuse limits or expands a students perceived and/or actual opportunities for college attendance.

Figure 1. A college opportunity framework.

In addition to social capital, we added another theoretical concept to help explain college opportunity for these students. This concept was inductively constructed (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) as a result of the data collected from the community college students. From our data, we came to understand that while schools can be sites for the accumulation and expansion of social capital, they also can be sites for what we have labeled as "institutional neglect and abuse." "Institutional neglect" refers to the inability or unwillingness of schools or its personnel to prepare students for postsecondary education, particularly four-year universities. "Institutional abuse" refers to those actions by institutional agents that discourage or produce barriers for college attendance. Such actions include: (a) being emotionally discouraging, (b) providing inaccurate information or insufficient knowledge, (c) withholding critical information, and (d) limiting access to opportunities for college. Institutional neglect and abuse also can be placed on a continuum from low to high volume. Enduring a "high volume" of institutional neglect and abuse would entail being exposed to all of the elements described above. Enduring a "low volume" of institutional neglect and abuse would involve being exposed to one. One example of institutional neglect is being placed in a school curriculum that does not prepare one for postsecondary education. An example of institutional abuse is experiencing a high school counselor who discourages college attendance and withholds critical information about the college admissions process. Spanning their K-12 public schooling experiences, we came to understand how exposure to or accumulation of high or low volumes of social capital or institutional neglect or abuse limited or expanded these students' actual and/or perceived opportunities for college.

In line with other scholars in the college choice literature (McDonough, 1997; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2000; Teranishi, in press), we identified parents,

siblings, and extended family members within the family, and teachers, counselors, peers, and specialized honors programs within the school as potential agents of social capital. In addition, we labeled the general school curriculum, teachers, counselors, and administrators as potential agents of institutional neglect and abuse. The potential outcome of accumulating a high volume of social capital during a student's primary and secondary schooling is possessing greater opportunities for higher education. The potential outcome of enduring a high volume of institutional neglect and abuse is bearing limits on opportunities for higher education. In other words, a high volume of social capital produces a scenario of "good credit" thereby expanding a student's capacity for postsecondary opportunities. At the other extreme, a high volume of institutional neglect and abuse produces a scenario of "bad credit" thereby limiting a student's capacity for postsecondary opportunities. In the context of college and university admissions, the task of the admissions officer or other college personnel is to evaluate the records or "credit" of individual students, which, in many ways, represents the social capital they have accumulated or the institutional neglect and abuse they have endured. The following sections provide supportive evidence for the model.

Parents as Agents of Social Capital

Similar to a growing number of studies on the college attendance behavior of underrepresented students (Ceja, 2000; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Teranishi, in press), we found in both groups that their parents were positive influences during their K-12 schooling. For example, one of the university students had this to say:

> I don't remember my mom ever sitting me down and asking, "What do you want to do? What would you like to do?" She was just always really encouraging, going to all my music concerts, and always been so proud of me when I would

> come home with good grades. She just always told me to do whatever makes me happy. So she's never been like, "Study and do your homework so you can go to college." She never told me to do my homework. I just did it. I don't know how she did it, really. It was like an indirect influence that she had. She just was always there encouraging me to do my best.

Receiving emotional support from their parents was a common theme in the data for both groups of students. One of the community college students provided the following statement:

> Well my dad, I think he went up to elementary school -- 6th grade in Mexico; and then he started working in Mexico. I remember since I was young he was like "always study, always study." Right now I'm not so sure why. But, I remember him giving me lectures like "always study just in case your husband leaves you, and you always have something to fall back on. So get your degree in something so you know how to defend and provide for yourself." So that's what I remember. I remember that. Now I think he's saying that it's a way of life. You need to study to survive. He was always instilling in me the whole education issue of how you should always study. He would say that to all of us.

It is difficult to measure the impact of emotional support given by parents to their children. From these quotes, we can infer that the impact was salient. However, it was clear from our data that such support represented low volume social capital and was not sufficient for the students to acquire the opportunity to attend college, particularly a four-year university. Other social capital was needed. Because most of the students' parents did not possess the capacity to provide privileged information about college or access to opportunities for social mobility, they were dependent on others for social capital.

Siblings as Agents of Social Capital

Three of the twelve women in the university group were able to accumulate additional social capital from their siblings. One of the students described the role of her siblings in the following way:

> My parents did not know about college. Yeah, they encouraged me to do well in school, but that was about it. I have six older siblings who went to college; so they were the ones who influenced me. College was not known to my parents. The main thing for my parents was for me to finish high school because that is all they knew. College was really unknown to them. They did not understand it. So it was my siblings who I went to for advice and who told me about it.

Another university student provided this statement:

> I would say I started to think about going to college in the fourth or fifth grade. The year I was born was the year my oldest brother graduated high school. So when I was one year old, he was already in college. So I knew growing up that he was in college. And, everyone after that went to, at least, a community college. Not everyone graduated, but everyone went. A couple of them dropped out. My parents didn't know anything about college, but I knew I had to go since early on, every year, I had a sibling in college. When I was little, my sister used to take me to her classes at Northridge. I remember falling asleep in those classes. Everyone wanted to talk to me, but I just wanted to be left alone. She made me go with her.

Although the majority of the participants in both groups were unable to accumulate privileged information or knowledge about college from their parents, in the university group there were three instances where siblings served as key agents of social capital in providing such

information. In these cases, the students had a family member who could provide both emotional support and privileged information about college.

School-based Honors Programs as Agents of Social Capital

Unfortunately, none of the remaining research participants from either group had a sibling who attended college before them. Consequently, their path to college depended almost exclusively on the public school system. It was at this point in our analysis of the data that we began to see salient differences between the primary and secondary school experiences of these two groups. In the following excerpts, three university students describe the affect of being placed in a specialized, school-based, honors program:

> I think being in GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] made a big difference in my life. I was tested for GATE in third or fourth grade. In those classes, the teachers always told us that we were the smart ones. I was validated that way. I noticed that my neighborhood friends and I started being separated around that time. We weren't in the same classes, but we would still hang out after school. But they would be like "oh, you are the smart one, and I am not." I never believed that my friends weren't smart though. I just figured we were put in different classes.

It is important to note that every student from the university group was placed in a GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program. Some of the students were placed in GATE as a result of scores they achieved on school-administered tests. The majority of these students, however, were placed in GATE by the recommendation of a teacher. Each participant described positive and validating experiences as a result of being placed in a GATE program. The program, in and

of itself, produced a positive and encouraging context for these students. Another student described her GATE experience in the following way:

> I remember my elementary school years were hard, especially when we came back from Mexico, because we always had long hair and it would be in braids and they would make fun of us…things like that...especially for me and my sister. Everyone knew that we had just gotten back from Mexico, and that we did not know English very well. But once I made it to seventh grade, I was put in GATE. School became challenging and it was good. I attended a school that was predominantly Latino, but the classes I were in were predominantly white. So I did not hang around people from my classes. I did not necessarily like the people in my classes. I was hanging around people completely different.

Finally, a third student describes how her participation in GATE during elementary school influenced her middle and high school experiences:

> Elementary school was really difficult at first. I was in the Spanish classes. I think it must have been ESL classes. I do not remember speaking English until like the fifth grade. So I did not fit in, and I felt like an outsider. What was amazing was that between the fifth and sixth grade, I was placed in the gifted classes. And that was quite a change. It greatly influenced my future. I remember that in the sixth grade we were encouraged to attend a magnet junior high. From what I know, the other students in the regular classes were not encouraged to do that. So from there, I went to a magnet school for junior high. I started taking college prep classes since then. It is pretty amazing to me, now that I think about it. If I had gone to my home school, I would never have gone

> through that. From what I hear, they don't push you to do anything there. Since I was in magnet, I was taking French, Algebra...I was taking all the classes. One switch between fifth and sixth grade really decided where I am today. Then in high school, I took honors and AP classes, all college prep classes. Those classes were all filled by magnet students.

One of the axioms of social capital is that it possesses the capacity to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The students' participation in GATE programs illustrates both outcomes. Similar to the student's description above, all of the participants stated how their participation in GATE during their elementary school career was linked to their participation in honors and AP programs during their middle and high school careers. In other words, the social capital the students accumulated as a result of their participation in GATE reproduced itself in their participation in honors and AP programs in middle and high school. Moreover, the students who were able to participate in GATE acquired additional and expanded forms of social capital, which will be discussed later.

The General Curriculum, Institutional Neglect, and the Affect of ESL (English as a Second Language) and Special Education Tracking

It is no coincidence that none of the community college students participated in a GATE program. In fact, most of the students in this group were not even aware that such programs existed. One of the students had this to say:

> Later, I always wondered why I had never heard of GATE or those other honors programs. I felt like it was never an option for me. So, by the time I graduated from high school, people had taken honors and AP classes and were going to four-year universities. And I felt like I could have taken those classes just as

easily as they did. I just didn't feel like it was an option. I was never given that chance.

Latinas/os represent over 44% of the total statewide enrollment in California public schools (California Department of Education, 2001). Yet, less than 20% of Latinas/os are participants in the GATE program. Conversely, Whites represent approximately 35% of California's statewide enrollment. Yet, Whites represent more than 52% of GATE participants (California Department of Education, 2001). As our data indicate, GATE served as a key tracking mechanism that began in elementary school and influenced the students' curriculum placement, and therefore college eligibility, through their high school careers. If we assume that academic ability and potential occur with no less frequency in low-income communities and among Latinas/os and other underrepresented students than in middle-income communities and White students, then we argue that the percentages described above, in and of themselves, highlight a key source of institutional neglect experienced by many Latinas/os within the California public school system.

Most of the community college students in our study were placed in general curriculum courses. As a consequence, by the time they reached their junior and senior years they had not completed enough college-preparation coursework that would make them eligible for admittance into a four-year university. Unlike the university group, the community college students indicated that they were never really encouraged to go to college. They stated that the expectations that were communicated to them were low. In a few instances, students found themselves "tracked" in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes or special education programs with little opportunity to be placed in the "regular classes." One of the students described her experience in the following way:

> I started feeling discouraged about attending college when I was in junior high. I felt less capable of achieving that goal. It was because I was always stuck in the ESL classes. I knew that I would have to fight twice as hard as the students who were placed in the regular classes. Even though I felt discouraged at that time I never lost hope. During high school, however, I was still stuck in mostly ESL classes. No one ever asked me, "Do you want to be here or do you want to be there?" So, I felt discouraged and I was losing hope. By my senior year, I had lost all hope. I knew I wasn't going to attend any college. The reason I lost hope was because I felt I wasn't prepared for college the way the other students were. I was never given the time from a counselor to go over the classes I should have taken to pursue my education, or what to do to apply to college. I was basically never given a chance.

Similar to the effects of the GATE program, a number of the students who were placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program felt that their later curriculum placements were set. Other scholars (Faltis & Arias, 1993; Lucas, 1993) have reported similar tracking effects for students placed in ESL programs. They note that the programmatic goals of ESL programs do not include building the academic competencies of students that would prepare them for postsecondary education. The primary goal of ESL is short-term language development. These scholars (Faltis & Arias, 1993; Lucas, 1993) have found that the tracking of students in ESL programs occurs for an average of seven years or more; and that ESL tracking prevents and delays access to any kind of college preparation curriculum.

Another community college students describes the low expectations of her ESL program:

> As a result of being in ESL, I kind of flaked out in a way. Like I never really studied because I knew I was going to pass in ESL. If I miss-spelled a word, if I didn't put a verb, or if I didn't put a comma, it's not like they were going to correct it. They were just going to excuse me because after all I'm ESL. It's okay for me to miss it. So I just never really cared to study. I was like, "Why? It doesn't matter how I write it. They're always going to give me an A or B anyway." My grammar would be wrong and my spelling may be off, but that was never a factor.

It is clear from the above quote above that her collegiate preparation was neglected. There was never the expectation or goal that she would want to prepare herself for attending a four-year university. This student would later go on to be tracked into a vocational program in her high school. She was encouraged to participate in "beauty school." Other students in the community college group also were advised to participate in vocational programs.

In addition to the tracking affects of ESL, one of the students in the community college group found herself "fighting" her placement in a special education program. She described her placement in "resource" in the following way:

> Like first they convinced my parents to put me in that resource class. They had a meeting with my mom because I think they found out that I spoke two languages at home. I don't really know why, but I think it had to do with me speaking both languages; and they thought it was a concern. Like I would get Cs in English all the time. But I really didn't like resource because I was placed with all the kids that spoke different languages. It wasn't just Spanish, it was like Chinese and Korean too. And I didn't feel a part of it. I was like "Why am I here? Why are

> they secluding me?" I didn't like it. And then when I went to junior high they tried to stick me in like a special chain. And I was like "no special thing. I'm getting out." I hated it so much. I would come home and cry and say "Mom why am I in this class? I don't even know my history." Because I didn't have history from 4th to 6th grade.

Although Latinas/os are underrepresented in GATE, honors, and AP programs, they are overrepresented in special education programs (Artiles, 1998; Harry and Anderson, 1994, 1999). And, like the student's description above, many Latinas find themselves tracked in special education programs. The student continued her story by describing her efforts to be placed out of a special education curriculum:

> And in junior high they were trying to do it again. And I was like, "What?" I remember my first day in junior high. I'm not sure if it was ESL or some type of resource…it was like a helping class…but I remember I was like, "No, I'm getting out of here." And I told my parents about it and I was like, "I can do this on my own. I don't need help." I'm not against it, but for me I knew that if I were in that program I wouldn't push myself as hard. I was always thinking, "Why am I in here? Am I dumb or something?" So, I wrote a letter and had my mom sign it. I turned it into the office and after two weeks they did like tests on me -- like I was illiterate or something. And they were like, "Oh, you don't belong here. So they were like, "Ok, go on." But then it would feel like a threat to me because they were like, "Ok, we'll be watching you." And I was like, "ewww." So I think junior high for me was a big waste of time.

The K-12 schooling experiences of the community college students were quite unlike those of the university students. As mentioned earlier, most of them were not even aware of GATE, honors, or AP programs. Their experience comprised of being exposed to a curriculum that, to a large extent, neglected their preparation for college admission. Like social capital, institutional neglect reproduced itself for these students. The tracking that they experienced in the general curriculum, ESL, and special education programs illustrates this point.

Teachers as Agents of Social Capital or Institutional Neglect or Abuse

In addition to the students' placement in honors, general, language, or special education programs, the influence of their teachers played an important role in their opportunities for college attendance. For the university students, their placement in a GATE program exposed them to encouraging teachers with high expectations. Many of these students described the extraordinary support they received from their GATE teachers. One of the students had this to say:

> I was referred to GATE in the sixth grade, and then went in seventh grade. It was hard being from a family that really did not have a lot of money to do very many things. In the seventh grade though, I had really awesome teachers. I even wrote an essay about one of my teachers. And she won an award because of that essay. I get emotional when I think about it. Mrs. Dempsey and Mrs. Gradey, they were awesome teachers. I could stay after class for help. They knew I did not like being in class with those people, but they were always there to support me. (At this point, the student is overwhelmed with emotion and begins to cry.)

Another university students described her GATE teachers in the following way:

> Some of the GATE teachers became like friends to us, not just the student-teacher relationship. Most of the teachers really cared about how we did academically, and about how we were learning. They would open their doors to us at lunchtime. I can remember two teachers, in particular, that really cared. One of them taught us real life stuff, like how to balance a checkbook and buy stocks, and do your taxes. It wasn't necessarily school stuff. I am really grateful to them and the support that they gave me. One day I will go back and tell them what a difference they made in my life.

Every student in the university group had something positive to say about their GATE and honors teachers. The relationship with their teachers gave them access to strong emotional support and access to important information about college. Their relationships with their honors and AP teachers in high school proved equally beneficial. Many of the students commented that the "incredible" letters of recommendation they received from their teachers augmented their chances for acceptance into an elite university. In short, many of the students' teachers served as "high volume" agents of social capital.

Unfortunately, most of the community college students did not have many positive things to say about their teachers. Moreover, none of them reported that their teachers assisted them in the college planning process. A few of these students described having a caring relationship with a teacher, but rarely did such relationships concern their academic development or serve as a conduit for college opportunities. When reviewing the data, the students reported more negative experiences with teachers than positive ones. For example, one of the students had this to say:

> In second grade I had this teacher. The main teacher was Mr. B. But the helper teacher was this one mean lady and I would often go home crying because of her.

> And, my dad was like "if we have to I'm going to go and tell her off." The way it would happen is they would separate us -- mostly all the minorities because we couldn't read or write well enough in English -- because that was our second language and Spanish was our first. So they would have all the other kids with Mr. B. sitting at the big table when it came to reading time. And then they would have all the other minorities, mostly it was Spanish speaking students, and they would have us at a smaller table. And the assistant would be the one teaching us. But for some reason, I don't know if it was my learning capabilities, but I would have problems. I don't remember if it was reading or writing. I think it was spelling. And she would just get on my case and she would just make me feel so stupid. She would embarrass me in front of the other students, and then I would cry, and then feel even more embarrassed. So that was the time that I started getting scared of school. Like I didn't want to go to school.

In his book Manufacturing Hope and Despair (2001), Stanton-Salazar argues that teachers and counselors, especially for low-income immigrant students, may take on the role of "co-parent" – a role that involves the potential of nurturance, neglect, and abuse. The above quote describes the abusive consequences of "teacher as co-parent," and how such emotional abuse can have lasting psychological and social affects. This story was shared by a 21-year-old woman. To remember such an early childhood experience speaks to its intensity and negative affect.

Another community college students shared the following experience:

> Math was my worst subject. I think I can trace it back to elementary school. The teacher would make us go up to the chalkboard and do a problem -- that was the worst for me. I used to hate going to school. From that point on I did not want to

> go to school because I knew that I was not going to know the answer. I would panic. I did not want to go. I remember it happened more than one time, but one time I was up there and it was like a money problem with dimes, pennies, and nickels. And she gave me the problem and I was able to come up with the right amount of change. But the thing was that it was the sort of problem that you had to write how many of the different types of change there were. So it was the right amount of change, but not the right amount of nickels or pennies or whatever. And she was like "Fabiola don't you go with your parents and to the store?" I was in the fifth grade and she's like "Do you ever go and pay?" And I was like "No. I go with them sometimes to the grocery store, but you know…my parents always paid." She made me feel so stupid. And then she goes, "Yeah, well you have to go more often with your parents to the grocery store." And then I felt so bad. And, I remember another problem situation like that one. And it was my turn, and I heard one of the boys say, "Oh she's not going to know the answer." I did get the right answer, thank God. I was just so terrified. I just did not want to go to school.

When asked about their academic experiences in school, many of the community college students shared negative or even disturbing incidents that involved their teachers. Often, they would trace those incidents back to the elementary school years. However, the students shared other negative experiences with their teachers in middle and high school. For the majority of the students, their teachers did not play a supportive role in their preparations for college. Occasionally, the students would describe neglectful or emotionally abusive incidents similar to those described above.

Counselors, Social Capital, and Institutional Neglect or Abuse

Unlike teachers, counselors played an influential role for some students or no role at all for other students. For the university students, the students' presence in GATE honors, and AP programs exposed them to highly supportive counselors, specifically designated for honors students. One student had this to say about her counselor:

> I don't think I ever met with a regular counselor. But the one who was for the honors kids, I would see him all the time. Especially my senior year, I would see him like once a week. Since we were the honors kids, we got a lot of support. He would come in and make sure we were taking the right classes, and being on track. And when college reps would visit to recruit, we were always the ones who would be called in to see them. We were taken care of that way.

Another student had this to say:

> I never saw a regular counselor. Not that I can remember. They were always for attendance or the troubled kids. That's how we saw it. If you were in trouble, you went to see the counselor. I did see my magnet coordinator. He knew all of us by name. So if I ever had a problem, I would go to see him. I guess you could kind of count him as our counselor. He was our advisor; he told us what we should do. I would see him almost on a daily basis. He helped me out a lot.

The students' participation in GATE and honors programs had expanded effects with regard to the social capital they were accumulating. In the case of counselors, the students had access to and utilized "high volume" agents of social capital -- counselors that could provide emotional support, privileged information, and in many cases, access to opportunities for college.

For most of the community college students, counselors had no role nor positive influence in their decisions or preparations for college admittance. In fact, half of these students were without access to a counselor as a result of decisions made by school district administrators to lay off school counselors. One student described the situation in the following way:

> No, unfortunately the year I started high school was the year they took away all of the counselors at the whole district. I think it had something to do with the money. They just didn't have the money to pay for them. So, there were no counselors to help us with anything.

For those students who did have access to a counselor, the ratio of students to counselors was so high that many of them perceived little, if any, opportunity to talk with a counselor about college. For example, a different student described the following:

> I think I had a counselor for like my junior year. But, for two years I didn't have a counselor. In my third year there was a counselor, but like one counselor for every graduating class – that's like one for every 800 students or something. So, I never had any contact with a counselor. I didn't know how to reach him, so I was like "whatever." I just never went. There was another counselor, a career counselor, and I was afraid of her. I don't know if she was like that just towards me, I don't think so -- but she was really discouraging when I asked her questions about college. She was like, "Why do you want to know that?" I didn't want to ask her anything, so I never went to go talk to her again. So, I never knew anything about any scholarships, or any universities, and what the SATs were.

Unfortunately, the most common scenario regarding counselors for the community college students involved no contact. The statement we heard most frequently by these students was "I

never had any support from a counselor to go to college. They never told us anything about the whole application process." The ratio of students to counselors is high in nearly every public high school in the United States (Johnson, 1999). This prohibits adequate counseling about the college planning or application process. This reality has more consequences for students like those in our study – students without others to turn to about the college planning process. Without such critical information from counselors, the students' college planning and application process was simply neglected.

Specialized College Outreach and Preparation Programs as Agents of Social Capital

Beyond supportive teachers and counselors, the university students' participation in honors and AP programs gave them access to college preparation and outreach programs outside of their schools. A student described the support she received from a collegiate outreach program in the following way:

> During my freshman year I got involved with the EOP program. I would meet with the EOP counselor like once a month. We would do university visits. They organized stuff like that for the EOP students. One summer I spent three weeks at UC Santa Barbara, in the dorms. It was a SAT prep class. They organized everything. It was totally funded. So I had that kind of support since then. And in my junior and senior year, I would stop by to see her like once a week, just to see what I needed to do.

Another student had this to say:

> I was also a part of the Ivy League Project. That's a program that takes minority students from California to the East Coast to visit schools. That's how I was interested in U-Penn. The guy who founded the program was from our school.

> The trip was twelve days long. I actually went twice, my freshman year and my senior year. We visited almost all of the Ivy League schools over there. I think seeing that there were Latinos at those schools really helped me out. I knew I wanted to go to college, but I thought a UC would be it. But then I saw that there were people like me who made it. I thought, hey! If these people can make it, maybe I can apply and get into a private school. So that is what got me interested. We stayed in the dorms with the students and basically lived the college life for those 12 days.

A third student made this statement about her participation in a college preparation program:

> I was lucky because I was in Upward Bound. During the summer before my senior year, before the application process, I went to Cal Lutheran University. We had English classes where we could start writing our personal statements. And then on the weekends, during the academic year, they would help us with filling out the applications. We could take in our essays for them to review and help us revise them.

Nearly every university student participated in a college preparation program such as those cited above. Such programs gave them access to "high volume" sources of social capital. As a result of such programs, the students were able to receive emotional support, privileged information, and access to various opportunities for college.

While the university students in our study were busy polishing up their personal statements, taking visits to highly selective universities, or preparing for the SAT, our community college students were wondering what they were going to do after high school. Only one of the community college students participated in a college preparation program. The

program, although helpful and supportive, facilitated her application process to the local community college. For the majority of the community college students, they turned to each other for answers, advice, and support.

Peers as Agents of Social Capital

Without supportive teachers, counselors, or college preparation programs, the community college students congregated in small groups and in pairs and inquired about pursuing their postsecondary education at the local community college. A student described this behavior below:

> It started with the application process. My friend, Liz told me about it. She was like, "Ok, tomorrow you have to go and turn in your application. And then next week, we're all going over there to take the assessment test; and you have to take it." So, basically I knew from them how to apply to the community college. They helped me out with that. And then we met Nina, and she was a big help.

Despite the institutional neglect and occasional abuse they experienced within their schools, these students still possessed the motivation to continue their education after high school. Without the academic credentials to enroll in a four-year university, the students kept their hope of a university degree alive by applying and enrolling in the local community college.

The role of peers for the university students was quite different. Their participation in targeted honors programs led to the creation of a network of peers who provided additional support and reinforced their motivation to attend an elite university. A student described her network of friends in the following way:

> My friends in high school...there were a core group of about seven of us that were in college prep and honors. We all were in the middle...between the white-

> washed Mexican kids and the Mexican immigrant kids. The seven of us hung out together; and we said that we were going to go to college, but would not forget about our community. So I think that had a lot to do with going to college. We joined clubs together. We helped each other get through the application process. We went on trips together, to colleges and stuff. We just supported each other.

Another student had this to say about the influence of her friends in her preparations for college:

> Not many students from my high school went away to college. But the ones that did were my friends. Two went to UC Davis, one to UCLA, and one went to a Christian college in San Diego. Out of 125 graduating seniors, only five of us left to go away to college from high school. Our school did not really prepare us very well to go on to higher education. But as friends, we encouraged each other; we helped each other through the entire application process.

Friendship groups have been found to have a strong influence in the college decision-making process (McDonough, 1996). This also was the case for the students in this study. Not only did they offer encouragement for one another, but they also would share privileged information about the college admissions process. With their exposure to honors programs, teachers, counselors, and college preparation programs, by the time these students were high school seniors, they had become high volume agents of social capital for each other.

Summary

The college enrollment behavior of underrepresented students has puzzled scholars for decades. Although much has been learned about the barriers to college attendance for this population, our current understanding has not led to improved outcomes. Recent work in the college choice literature (Ceja 2000, Freeman, 1997; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997;

McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2000; Teranishi, forthcoming) has improved our understanding of the college-decision making process of underrepresented students by utilizing the concepts of cultural and social capital. This study builds on that work and presents a framework of college opportunity.

Based on our study, we came to understand that Latina opportunities for college, particularly for four-year universities, are a result of exposure to or accumulation of high or low volumes of social capital or institutional neglect or abuse. The outcomes of such exposure or accumulation influences a students perceived and actual opportunities for college attendance. It was clear from our data that students who had acquired the opportunity to attend an elite university acquired "high volumes" of social capital beginning in elementary school and continuing through their high school careers. In other words, the accumulation of social capital in elementary school had reifying and expanding affects. Conversely, those students who did not acquire high volumes of social capital during their K-12 schooling experiences were often neglected with regard to their college planning and preparation process. More than that, our data highlighted high and low volumes of institutional neglect and abuse. The students who began their postsecondary education at a community college endured institutional neglect and abuse as a result of: (a) a poor or inadequate school curriculum, (b) being tracked in ESL or special education programs, (c) negative experiences with teachers, and (d) negative or no contact with counselors.

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Footnote

[1] Personal affiliations refer to such individuals as mentors, friends, relatives, parents, and school officials.